

Congresswoman Kosmasâ€™ Statement to the Augustine Committee

July 30, 2009

(Cocoa Beach, FL) – Today, Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24) was invited to testify at the Cocoa Beach, FL hearing of the Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee, chaired by Norm Augustine. Unable to attend in person due to votes in the U.S. House of Representatives, Congresswoman Kosmas submitted the following written statement:

Mr. Augustine and members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts and concerns with you today on behalf of my constituents in the 24th District. And thank you for assuming your daunting challenge. We understand the difficult task this panel faces and how high the stakes are for all who are involved in our space program.

A robust human spaceflight program is essential to our nation’s future – it drives technology and innovation, fulfills our innate human impulse to explore, and inspires future generations of engineers and scientists. A strong space program is crucial to our national security and our economy, and it is in the best interest of the nation.

The issues you are working to address, including the retirement of the shuttle program, the development of the next generation spacecraft, and the continued use of the International Space Station, will have economic impacts on communities across the country.

This is especially true for Central Florida. Local studies show the total direct and indirect impact of the looming spaceflight gap could approach 20,000 jobs lost.

The professional Space Coast workforce possesses unparalleled skills and dedication. These workers help to ensure our nation remains at the forefront of exploration and discovery. They support a program that is vital to our national security and they contribute enormously to our national and local economies.

This workforce, if lost, will not be easily reassembled for future projects. A five year - or longer – human spaceflight gap is simply unacceptable.

Minimizing the human spaceflight gap, ensuring the full utilization of the International Space Station (ISS) beyond 2015, and bringing future work related to research, development, and testing to Kennedy Space Center will help to minimize the loss of our unique workforce, ensure our continued commitment to America’s leadership in space, and transform how NASA does business.

I understand that you are considering presenting options to the President related to the extension of the space shuttle program. As launch delays mount, it is becoming increasingly likely that we will need to fly the Shuttle past 2010, which is why Senator Nelson and I fought to include Shuttle funding for 2011 in the Congressional budget. I am pleased that the Administration has made a commitment to flying the scheduled missions without a deadline, and I will keep working to ensure that NASA has the funding necessary to maintain jobs and complete the manifest.

Dr. Sally Ride's working group has also persuasively outlined the merits of adding additional shuttle flights. Preserving the highly skilled workforce at Kennedy Space Center and throughout Central Florida is one of my highest priorities, and I would support additional flights as long as we can launch them safely and provide funding levels that do not increase the gap by delaying the next generation of human spaceflight.

The International Space Station is a national asset that has bipartisan congressional support. The value of a National Laboratory in space should not be underestimated; there is enormous potential for discoveries that will enable us to explore our universe and improve life here on Earth. We have already invested a great deal in the ISS. Extending its use beyond 2015 will ensure that we maximize our investment while helping to retain the specialized Florida workforce through payload preparation at the Space Life Sciences Lab and additional launches from KSC.

Under the current plan, much of the effort to support the ISS between the retirement of the shuttle and operation of the next generation spacecraft will be undertaken by the emerging commercial sector. I believe this sector should be fostered in order to maintain access to the ISS, utilize the workforce, and ensure a healthy industrial base that can support future defense and civil programs.

Furthermore, the potential for complete reliance on the Russians for crew transport, for a price that could amount to billions, will mean American taxpayers' dollars will be shipped abroad instead of invested at home. This is unacceptable, especially at a time when we are threatened with losing jobs here at home.

I urge you to include in your presentation to the President options that will support the rapid development of domestic commercial capabilities.

One common responsibility for each of the Working Groups of this Committee is that each is focusing on 'industrial skill base'. Nowhere is that issue more critical than here in Florida. To that end, I urge you to consider offering an option that would establish a program office at KSC to manage the supply chain and logistics for the next generation spacecraft. As the final destination of the vast majority of the components and systems purchased by the Federal Government before departure into space, KSC could lead the way to a more sophisticated procurement mentality - which would reduce operating costs - and a healthier industrial base for NASA, the Department of Defense, and commercial launch activities.

I would also like to urge you to include options for new types of work to be located at Kennedy. Kennedy's operations expertise should be applied to the development and testing of the next generation spacecraft and associated hardware. The folks that process, maintain, and launch our vehicles know better than anyone else what elements are necessary to ensure a safe, efficient, and reliable program. Embedding the 'operations mindset' into development processes will not only utilize an experienced workforce and existing infrastructure, but will also result in increased affordability and sustainability.

Finally, with regards to funding, I believe that the investment in NASA is one of the best we as a nation can make in our future. The benefits of human spaceflight are numerous and far-reaching.

I urge you to provide an honest and adequate budget assessment with every option you present to the President. We cannot complete our important missions if we continue shuffling funding from one program to another and pitting NASA projects against each other. Since entering office, I have fought at every turn to increase funding for NASA, and I will continue working with my colleagues from both parties to secure the funds necessary to maintain our leadership in space and preserve jobs.

How we choose to address the challenges NASA currently faces will have a lasting impact on our standing as the world leader in space, science, and technology. We need innovative and effective solutions to these challenges to ensure a strong human spaceflight program, to support America's strategic interests, and to protect jobs and revitalize our economy.

Thank you again for your dedication to our nation's space program and for affording me the opportunity to share the views of those on the Space Coast. Our community is relying on your expertise to help determine the best path for the future of human spaceflight.

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